



# Women's History Month 1999



## Women: Putting Our Stamp on America



Courtesy of  
Office of Equal Employment Opportunity  
and Cultural Diversity  
and DISA/NCS  
Federal Women's Program Committee

DEOMI Heritage Series Pamphlet 99-2

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## **PREFACE**

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## **SCOPE**

The Topical Research Intern Program provides the opportunity for servicemembers and DOD civilian employees to work on diversity/equal opportunity projects while on a 30-day tour of duty at the Institute. During their tour, the interns use a variety of primary and secondary source materials to prepare a report pertaining to an issue of importance to equal opportunity (EO) and equal employment opportunity (EEO) specialists, supervisors, and other leaders throughout the Services. The resulting publications (such as this one) are intended as resources and educational materials and do not represent official policy statements or endorsements of the DOD or any of its agencies. The publications are distributed to EO/EEO personnel and selected senior officials to aid them in their duties.

**Prepared by  
Directorate of Research  
Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute  
Patrick Air Force Base, Florida 32925-3399**

**September 1998**

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## **Women: Putting Our Stamp on America**

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As we come to the end of a decade and approach the beginning of a new millennium, we remember our past to shape our future. The story of American women is the story of strong, courageous, and persevering women whose challenges to social, political, and economic inequities and other injustices shaped our nation. Today's generation owes them remembrance and honor, for we all stand on their shoulders. They have put their stamp on America, paving the way for us to follow and giving us hope for the future. The theme for the 1999 Women's History Month is "Women: Putting our Stamp on America." Since our postage stamps honor much of what we hold dear -- our heroes of yesteryear, our legends of the arts and entertainment, our explorers and discoverers -- this document will celebrate the centuries and their women and retell the stories of a special few that have been commemorated with stamps, and who not only made significant contributions to federal service but whose lives changed our world. The women we have highlighted were more than "first women to..." They were women with exceptional achievements who were outstanding throughout their lives, who were an inspiration to their contemporaries, and who remain inspirational today. They were women who made durable contributions and brought about social change. Their stories are the stories of women who did not need a stamp of approval to stamp out inequalities, injustices, stereotypes, and suffering.

### **Putting a Stamp on History: Women Giving Birth to a Nation**

Our stamps are more than the currency of communication through the mails. They are reflections of memorable moments in our country's history. Their stories celebrate the events and personalities that shaped America. Because countries mirror their hopes and dreams in the designs of their stamps, one can gain knowledge and understanding of sociology, politics, and cultural anthropology through their study. They depict our founders, our leaders, our scientists and inventors, our artists, our discoveries and inventions, our causes and movements. They tell the story of our accomplishments and aspirations and our failures and frustrations. They speak of insights and industry, of hope and humanity. The power of their stories is not in the adversities but in their optimism, courage and resilience of spirit and inner strength. By telling their stories, by describing trends they shaped, by offering examples of women pioneers, activists, and ordinary women who transformed the world we live in, we encourage our followers to explore and take risks, to succeed and transform.

The first United States postage stamp was issued on July 1, 1847. (12:75) It bore the portrait of Benjamin Franklin, who was not only a statesman, scientist, signer of the Declaration of Independence, but was also the first Postmaster General of the United States. The first commemorative stamps were issued in Chicago for the 400-year anniversary celebration of Columbus's discovery of the New World. The Colombian set featured the first woman ever to be commemorated on United States postage, Queen Isabella of Spain.

**Queen Isabella** (1451-1504), provided the financial backing for Columbus's adventure into the unknown. Some thought the world was flat and that he would surely drop out of sight. Columbus returned triumphant and news of his discovery spread quickly. He made three more voyages and led the first European settlers to the New World. Queen

Isabella's patronage, which made his first visit possible, had opened the way for Spain's colonial power in the New World. (12:153)

**Martha Washington** (1731-1802), the First Lady of our country became the second woman to be honored on a stamp in 1902. (12:153) George Washington was commander of the Virginia forces in the French and Indian War when he began to court Martha Dandridge Custis. After their marriage, as was the custom, she assumed full responsibility for Washington's plantation, Mt. Vernon. When Washington was chosen to command the American forces in their struggles against Great Britain, she joined her husband in his headquarters and shared his camps, at Cambridge, Morristown, and Valley Forge. Her constant sewing for the troops, kindness for the suffering, and her cheerful devotion to her husband and to the nation inspired hope and confidence and helped sustain the War for Independence. After Washington's inauguration as President of the United States, Martha Washington fulfilled the social demands as our nation's hostess setting the standard for future First Ladies. She hosted weekly state dinners, and to demonstrate that the new government was republican as well as aristocratic, she hosted weekly receptions, which did not require special invitations, for all persons of respectability. Her belief "that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our disposition and not on our circumstances" (10:549) serves as a reminder to all of us today of how important attitude is in our daily lives.

**Pocahontas** (1597-1617), the third woman ever to be commemorated on U. S. postage, was pictured on the commemorative stamp for the 300th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown in Virginia in 1607. The original plans did not include her, but protests arose from historical groups that the postage set would not be complete without her story. Virginia was the first of the thirteen American colonies. It was begun by a trading organization, the Virginia Company. England thought an economic foothold in the New World would help her financially and prove valuable in her rivalries with Spain, Holland, and France. Captain John Smith led the original colonists across the Atlantic and helped keep the colony intact through a period of disease and near starvation. During the era of colonization, Native American women worked to keep peace between their societies and the Europeans. Pocahontas was the legendary Native American princess who saved John Smith's life when her people captured him. She was peacemaker and communicator between the Powhatan and the settlers. Her efforts to supply food and aid to the settlers saved them from starvation during their first hard years. Pocahontas learned English and the Christian faith, was baptized, and took the name of Rebecca when she married Englishman John Rolfe. Later, Pocahontas was a celebrity visitor to England where she and her husband were presented to King James I and his court. John Smith had requested the audience in writing to Queen Anne about his trials and tribulations in the New World and expressing his gratitude for the efforts of Pocahontas in the colony's survival. (10:79, 12:153)

**Sacagawea** (1787-1812), the Native American heroine who accompanied Lewis and Clark, is portrayed with them on the stamp commemorating the 1804 Lewis and Clark Expedition to the Pacific Northwest. The expedition showed that the Western frontier was indeed accessible by land and opened the way for settlement and commerce. Sacagawea, known as the "Bird Woman," guided the expedition over the Great Divide and secured the friendship of the Shoshone Indians. Sacagawea had been kidnapped from the Shoshones as a child by the rival Hidatsa tribe and was later sold to a French trapper. After reaching the

Great Divide she was reunited with the Shoshones and remained with them. Through her efforts the Shoshones gave the explorers ponies and supplies which enabled them to continue their overland journey. (10:218)

### **Stamping Out Inequality and Injustices: Slavery and Suffrage**

The importance of the Civil War to Black women is self-evident. But its importance to the liberation of all women cannot be overstated. It was in the abolitionist movement that women first realized the discrimination against them. They began breaking the norm against women speaking in public in order to demand civil rights for themselves and others, organizing to achieve political goals, and developing the courage to assert their convictions.

#### Stamping Out Slavery

**Harriet Tubman** (1820-1913), the first Black woman to be honored on a U.S. postage stamp, was an escaped slave who was brought North by the Underground Railroad in 1849. (6:189) For the next 10 years she made 19 journeys and guided over 300 slaves, including her 70-year-old parents, to their freedom. A reward of \$40,000 was offered for her capture but the "conductor" for the Underground Railroad was never caught. This remarkable fact was attributed to her meticulous planning, avoidance of old routes, and requirements for strict discipline among her followers. Harriet Tubman claimed, "I never ran my train off the track, and I never lost a passenger." (21:1) Of course, there was no secret railroad but dark, dangerous country roads which led to the homes of volunteers willing to hide slaves traveling north. She was illiterate and could not read road signs or maps but had an uncanny sense of direction and memorized landmarks. She developed codes and hid meanings in her scripture quotations and in the songs she sang. After the Slave Act of 1850 made it easier for escaping slaves to be kidnapped and traded, Harriet Tubman escorted many fugitive slaves all the way to Canada. She accomplished this alone without any supporting organization. Facing a death sentence if captured, it took great courage for Blacks to help slaves escape. Other Blacks called her "Moses" because she led her people to the Promised Land. John Brown saw her as a vital part of the slave revolt. "General Tubman," as John Brown called her, acted as a scout, spy, and nurse for the Union forces during the Civil War. She led a successful raid upon the Confederacy that freed about 800 slaves. After the war she was an advocate for women's rights. Although her first application for a veteran's pension was denied, Congress later granted her 20 dollars a month for her services as "commander of several men as scouts during the War of Rebellion." (24:353) She was buried with military rites and in World War II a ship was christened in her name. "Excepting John Brown," Frederick Douglass said, "I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our people." (24:353)

**Sojourner Truth** (1797-1883), the first Black woman to speak publicly against slavery, was born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree. As a child, she was sold to English-speaking people but Dutch was her native language. She was physically punished for her failure to understand and follow orders because it was interpreted as stupidity or stubbornness. When she fled the bondage of slavery, she wanted to give up her slave name. She had a deep personal faith and believed that the Lord had told her to change her name to "Sojourner" and "Truth" and to travel throughout the country to spread the truth. She could

not read or write but became famous for her oratorical skills. During the Civil War, she preached, sang and used her fund-raising skills to provide supplies for soldiers and was honored by Abraham Lincoln for her services. She strongly disagreed with the warnings from abolitionist Frederick Douglass that women's rights would undermine Black rights and diminish the "Negro's hour" and devoted her postwar life to gender issues. Her words before the American Equal Rights Association in 1867 expressed her views:

"I come from ...the country of the slave...There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be just as bad as it was before...I want women to have their rights. In the courts women have no right, no voice...You [men] have been having our rights so long, that you think, like a slave-holder, that you own us..." (7:9)

While in her eighties she attended the annual women's rights convention and traveled to 36 cities promoting women's suffrage. After her death New York State College honored the illiterate women by naming a library after her.

### Suffrage

The end of the Civil War brought about constitutional amendments granting citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States and the right to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, but restricting the right to male citizens only.

The Susan B. Anthony Commemorative Stamp of 1936 was issued in connection with the 16th anniversary of the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. The simple statement that the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied on the account of gender conveys the achievement, but none of the hardships that made that achievement possible.

Susan B. Anthony, an early advocate of suffrage for women, was born in 1820. It took her lifetime and over a century after her birth before women gained the right to vote. The victory was not the result of men's generosity but women's assertion of power.

**Susan B. Anthony** (1820-1906), is generally recognized as the founder of the women's rights movement. Her colleagues often engaged in other reforms such as temperance, abolition, and peace, but Susan B. Anthony felt everything must be second to women's rights. In her day women's rights were very limited. Women did not have the right to property. In fact, legally, they were properties themselves. Women's possessions, including the clothes on their back, became their husband's property after marriage. A husband had legal possession of everything a woman earned. They could not sign contracts or buy merchandise on credit. Women could not divorce and they did not have the right to guardianship of their own children. Susan B. Anthony rejected several proposals of marriage saying that she could not allow any man she loved who could have the constitutional right of self-government to be united with a political slave, which was her status as a woman. (3:4) Anthony, who was burned in effigy in a New York public square, issued a plea for all women to enter politics. "Forget what the world will say whether you are in your place or out of it." (3:84) For Susan B. Anthony, failure was never a

consideration. Although she did not live to see women's suffrage, she believed in its eventuality. "Failure is impossible," the last words Miss Anthony spoke in public, became the watchwords of the Suffrage Movement. (3:94)

Susan B. Anthony and other suffragists paved the way for women to vote and to enter politics. It is difficult for generations today, 150 years after the movement began, to realize that the acceptance of women as people was a revolutionary idea. Opinions that were once universal are easily forgotten when they are no longer universal.

Even after women gained the right to vote, many did not exercise their rights. Historically, men voted in greater numbers than women. However, in every presidential election since 1980, women have had higher voter turnout rates than men. In 1996, over 56.1 million women voted, compared with 48.9 million men. (11:8) Today, women's electoral power exceeds that of men. By 1990, over 54 percent of registered voters were women. (1:24) Running as outsiders, women have used anti-incumbent and anti-political attitudes to gain increasing numbers of political offices and have changed our political world.

### **Stamping Out Stereotypes in Occupational Roles**

According to Moynihan et al., "Notions about women's proper responsibilities or inherent nature are not immutable, they change from generation to generation in a complex process reflecting the needs and aspirations of all members of society." (15:5) Wars, the Industrial Revolution, and changing technologies created new roles and opportunities for women but those same opportunities required overcoming stereotypes. Nursing, now considered a traditional female role, was once a man's domain. Military nurses opened the doors for other types of jobs for women in the military. Technological advances created a need for additional workers and made it easier for women to leave home and enter the workplace.

### **Military Nurses Stamping Out Suffering and Disease**

Female military nurses were the forerunners of today's women in the military. Women have served as nurses in the military since Colonial days. Hundreds of women followed their husbands into battle caring for them and many others. They were perceived as ministering angels on the battlefield but they were also perceived as intruders into the male realm of nursing. The appropriateness of women's viewing and touching male bodies was highly questionable. (20:73) Few of the nurses were trained. Any woman could claim to be a nurse, and most were widows without children. Female nurses carried out custodial tasks, while skilled tasks were left to the men. They were expected to work for altruistic rather than monetary reasons.

By 1802 the United States had only two surgeons and 25 men in its military medical corps. The outbreak of the Civil War created a demand for nurses. Women defied convention and cared for bloody male bodies on the battlefield and in makeshift hospitals. Outraged by newspaper accounts of unsanitary conditions in the treatment of the wounded citizens, readers demanded change. In response, the Secretary of War appointed Dorothea Dix superintendent of female Army nurses on January 10, 1861. Later that year Congress authorized the Surgeon General to employ women in the military hospitals. Dix required that her nurses be 35-50 years old, plain looking, and of good character. (3:20) By the war's end over 6,000 women served as nurses. Union Army nurses who are well known today for other

achievements include author Louisa May Alcott, anti-slavery heroine Harriet Tubman, and civil rights activist Sojourner Truth.

Louisa May Alcott's (1832-1888) nursing experience during the war inspired her first books which were written for boys and told stories of the violence of war. Urged to write for girls, she published *Little Women*, the classic of juvenile literature. Its popularity was immediate and enormous. Booksellers found it hard to meet the demand. Its massive appeal emphasized to the nation that the reading interests of young women had been ignored. The tomboy heroine's struggle for virtue and her growing pains defining her femininity are timeless aspects of personal growth and made the book popular for generations of young girls. America in the nineteenth century was rapidly becoming an industrial society and workers were experiencing many hardships. Her later works were written for adults. She wrote about a working woman's sufferings and her decision to become a women's rights worker. Louisa May Alcott lent her name to the Suffrage Movement but was not active because she was so busy promoting women's right to labor. Writing to the annual convention of the American Woman Suffrage Association in 1885, she said, "I should be a traitor to all I most love if I did not covet a place among those who are giving their lives to the emancipation of the white slaves of America." (24:8)

**Dr. Mary Edwards Walker** (1832-1919), is the only woman of any war to have been awarded the Medal of Honor. During the Civil War she became a nurse because she was denied acceptance as a military physician. She later received a commission as an assistant surgeon and became the first female doctor in the military. She wore the uniform of a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant and was the highest-ranking woman to serve in the Civil War. Dr. Walker was captured on the battlefields of Tennessee, accused of being a spy for the Union Army, and taken prisoner. After her release in a prisoner exchange, she was assigned to a Union facility for Confederate women prisoners and then a war-related orphanage. She was dismissed before the war's end when men subordinates complained about taking orders from a woman. President Andrew Johnson awarded Dr. Walker the Medal of Honor for her patriotic zeal in caring for the wounded and her hardships as a prisoner of war. The medal was rescinded during a military review of all awards after World War I. Although the stated purpose was to increase prestige, some believed it was because of her involvement as a suffragette. Over 900 men also lost their medals. She refused to return the medal and wore it until her death. Dr. Walker believed that the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment entitled women to vote and alienated other suffragists when she did not support the drive for the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Believing that corsets were very detrimental to women's health, she was a champion of dress reform. She was ridiculed for dressing in men's garb that she believed was more practical for work. (24:362)

**Phoebe Yates Levy Pember** (1823-1913), accepted a post as a matron at Chimboratzo, a Confederate Army hospital, when the Confederate government authorized the hiring of females as matrons and ward attendants to relieve the shortage of hospital staff. Before the end of the war Chimboratzo was to become the largest and most innovative military hospital in the world. Up until then, people had been scared of fresh air, but Phoebe rolled up the sides of the tent. (22) As the first woman administrator, she encountered much opposition in the man's domain, but it did not deter her. She believed that "a woman must soar beyond the conventional modesty considered correct under different circumstances." (10:44) Her meager income was supplemented by writing for the War Department. Her



wartime book, *A Southern Woman's Story*, describes the conviction, driving forces, and perseverance of southern women.

"The women of the South had been openly and violently rebellious from the moment they thought their state's rights touched. They incited the men to struggle in support of their views, and whether right or wrong, sustained them nobly to the end. They were the first to rebel--the last to succumb." (16:1)

When the war ended, the Union Army sent the women home because they were no longer needed. Thirty years later Congress provided the nurses a small pension for their services.

The Spanish-American War broke out in 1898 and brought a new need for nurses. Typhoid fever, yellow fever, malaria, and dysentery were causing 10 times the deaths of battle injuries. Necessity demanded that Congress authorize the appointment of women nurses who would work under contract without military status for thirty dollars a month plus one daily ration. African-Americans were initially rejected but later recruited because of the misconception that Blacks were immune to typhoid fever. (14:115) Countless numbers of African-American women served in exchange for their freedom from slavery.

**Clara Louise Maass** (1876-1901), was one of the first contract nurses. She was sent to Cuba where she became involved in the controversy over the cause of yellow fever. At the time, no one knew whether the tropical fever was caused by filth or the bite of a mosquito. Animals were not known to be susceptible to the disease so human subjects were needed to test the mosquito theory. The risk of having a mild case of yellow fever in a controlled environment under a doctor's care was thought to be less than the risk of contracting it without such care. Seven volunteers were bitten by mosquitoes. Knowing that death was a possibility, Clara Louise Maass was the only American woman to volunteer. Two men died but she survived. Several months later she volunteered again. This time she contracted yellow fever and died at the age of 25. She was buried with full military honors. Her life and death are of utmost significance in the role of medical advancement. (2)

Again, the war's end brought a reduction in the number of women nurses. However, their contributions convinced the Surgeon General that women should be a permanent part of the Army medical system. The Army Nurse Corps began in 1901 and was authorized to have 100 nurses for the next 10 years. The Navy Nurse Corps followed when "the sacred 20" nurses reported for duty in 1908. (20:90)

World War I created an enormous, worldwide demand for nurses. In 1918, the Secretary of War established the Army School of Nursing to create more nurses for the war. At peak strength there were over 23,000 military nurses. (20:97) Congress rewarded women's heroic contributions by granting them officer rank without entitlements in 1920 and retirement benefits in 1926. Nurses did not receive the pay and allowances of rank until 1942. Social expectations were restrictive. Those who married or became pregnant while in the military were dishonorably discharged. Married nurses were not permitted to join the Army until 1942 or the Navy until 1944.

Over 69,000 women served and several hundred lost their lives in World War II. (20:105) Approximately 500 African-American nurses served in the segregated units in the United States as well as overseas. After 82 Army and Navy nurses became prisoners of war, the Army realized that "nurses were not ethereal angels of mercy but human beings who had

to have some of the same training given to male recruits to help them save their own lives." (17:100) Nurses started receiving survival training in ocean, jungle, desert, and arctic environments. Flight nurse training programs were initiated for air evacuation.

The Army-Navy Nurse Act of 1947 established the Army and Navy Nurse Corps as a permanent staff corps and authorized commissions for women up to lieutenant colonel/commander. The head of each Corps could hold a temporary commission as a colonel or captain, the highest rank for a military woman. The Air Force Nurse Corps was established in 1949 when the Army and Air Force Nurse Corps agreed to separate their medical activities. Men, who had at first dominated the nursing field, became eligible to join the Army Nurse Corps in 1955. The Army established all-male nursing units in 1966 in combat areas, but the concept failed because the male patients wanted female nurses.(9:227) Nurses participated in the Korean War and afterwards served on humanitarian missions aiding refugees and earthquake victims and fighting epidemics around the world. Nurses in Vietnam were exposed to combat, received combat pay, and many were awarded combat medals.

The nurse's journey to overcome stereotypes and to become part of the military and gain acceptance was long. The selfless nature of their training has prevented many nurses from realizing the historical significance of their contributions. Since their history is not well known, their war efforts under combat conditions and on the battlefields were overlooked by many during the recent arguments about women in combat. (20:112)

### Stamping Out War

From Revolutionary War saboteurs and World War I poster girls to combat fliers, women have played many roles in the military. However, they were often turned to only in times of great need. The need was most often felt when manpower shortages threatened war efforts.

Revelations of the roles of women who served as spies, messengers, and scouts during the Revolutionary War have come to light in letters, diaries, and other documents. People involved in intelligence operations are often unidentified and lost to history but the activities of Abigail Adams, Molly Pitcher, and Sybil Ludington are known.

**Abigail Adams** (1744-1818), was devoted to liberty. She opened her home to troops and refugees, observed activities in Boston and Charleston, and passed on the information to her husband, John, who later became the second President of the United States. After the battle of Bunker Hill, he acknowledged her contributions: "There is a lady at the foot of Pen's Hill who obliges me...with clear and fuller intelligence than I can get from a whole committee of gentlemen." (18:17) In addition to influencing the course of war, Abigail Adams was an early opponent of slavery and an activist for women. She was distinguished as one of the leading women writers of her day. She commented frequently on the unfair treatment of girls in education and is noted for her famous appeal to her husband to "Remember the Ladies" and include them in the Declaration of Independence. His dismissive reply noted his awareness that "another Tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented." (7:3) Angered, she threatened to petition. Elizabeth Cady Stanton later described Abigail Adams as "the first American woman who threatened rebellion unless the rights of her sex were secured." (7:3)

**Sybil Ludington** (1761-1839), was a Revolutionary War heroine who rode 40 miles on horseback through the New York countryside rallying the militia. The militia responded to the 16 year-old girl. Although the city of Danbury was looted and burned, the British were forced to retreat. (23)

Numerous women, including African-Americans, supported the troops in the American Revolution earning money as cooks, laundresses, seamstresses, and as nurses. Many of them, including Martha Washington accompanied their men to the battlefields. Few occupations were open to women so, unable to support themselves, they became "camp followers." The camp followers were so common that Continental regulations specifically excluded them from rum and whiskey rations.

**Molly Pitcher (Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley)** (1754-1832), had been a camp follower for two years when she marched to the Battle of Monmouth in 1778. (24:232) She was already known as "Molly Pitcher" for her dangerous work of carrying water to the soldiers on the battlefield. Her husband was in charge of an artillery gun and when he was wounded, she made him comfortable, then took over the gun until the British retreated that night. The general personally thanked her and recommended to Congress that she be rewarded. Congress accepted the recommendation, commissioned her as a sergeant and gave her half pay for the rest of her life. Some controversy exists that the heroine may actually have been Margaret Corbin, but the bravery of 'Molly Pitcher' has become legendary. (24:233)

It was not uncommon for women to disguise themselves as men during the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican American War, and the Civil War. By the time the United States entered World War I, entrance physical exams prevented their guise as men. The Navy found a loophole and was the first service to admit women. By the end of the war, nearly 13,000 Navy and Marine Corps women had made substantial contributions to the war effort. In 1925, Congress passed a law barring women from military service outside the nursing corps. When women were needed in World War II, Congress had to draft new legislation in order to accept them.

In 1942, the military expanded to accommodate women by adding the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), Women Appointed for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES), The Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), and the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (SPARS). (6:79) Nancy Love headed the WAFS, which was composed of all experienced volunteer pilots. She was well qualified for the job. She had been one of the pilots in an aviation company that she had founded with her husband and had 10 years' experience safety testing aircraft innovations for the U. S. Bureau of Air Commerce. A few days later the Army Air Corps formed the Women's Flying Training Detachment, and Jacqueline Cochran went to work for \$1.00 a year.

**Jacqueline Cochran** (1910-1980), an orphan, grew up in severe poverty. Despite the Great Depression, she saved enough money to take flying lessons. She was a match for male aviators and set 17 national and international speed records. Frustrated by American neutrality at the beginning of World War II, she wrote Eleanor Roosevelt for assistance in getting the military to use female pilots. With the backing of the United States War Department she joined the British Air Transport Authority. She recruited other women pilots who flew 120 types of planes. When America entered the war, she returned and organized the Women's Airforces Service Pilots (WASPS) in 1942. She recruited women who were

licensed pilots with over 200 hours of flying time despite the government's war ban on civilian flying. The WASPS and WAFS merged in 1943 and Cochran became director. The pilots performed vital services for the military: ferrying planes, towing targets for gunnery practice, and training male pilots. They were also test pilots for planes that were having mechanical problems. The women were subject to military regulations but they were officially civilians with no military benefits. After the WASPS was disbanded, Cochran became a reporter and covered both the Pacific and European theaters of war. Jacqueline Cochran was the first woman civilian to receive the Distinguished Service Medal. After the Army and Air Force separated and integrated women, Jacqueline became a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force. In 1953 she became the first woman to break the sound barrier and continued to set speed and altitude records. She was promoted to colonel before her retirement. (6:93, 24:87)

The way for women pilots during the war had been paved by pioneer aviatrixes Bessie Coleman, Harriet Coleman, Amelia Earhart, and Blanche Stuart Scott. Born in a one-room cabin, Bessie Coleman (1893-1926) overcame great obstacles to reach her goal to become a pilot. In the early days of aviation most people did not believe that Blacks or women had the intelligence to fly. Bessie Coleman was not only Black, she was also a woman. Denied admission to aviation schools in the United States because of race and sex, but determined to learn how to fly, she went to Europe. In Paris, she received her pilot's certificate, becoming the first Black woman to become a licensed pilot and the first person of any race or gender to receive an international license that enabled her to fly anywhere in the world. She returned to the United States performing in flying shows throughout the country and became famous for her air acrobatics and high-flying stunts. She began giving flying lessons, and delivered lectures urging other Blacks to fly. Her courage earned her the name, "Brave Bessie." She died when her plane malfunctioned during a show practice. (7:41)

**Harriet Quimby** (1875-1912), became the first American woman and the second woman in the world to receive a pilot's license, only five years after the Wright brothers patented their flying machine. She performed daring aerobatic exhibitions before crowds of thousands. Most were seeing their first airplane. She was the first woman to pilot a plane across the English Channel. Her daring aviation career was brief. She lost her life in an aircraft accident decades before the more famous Amelia Earhart. (24:285)

**Amelia Earhart** (1897-1937), was probably one of the best-loved public figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She earned worldwide respect, becoming the first woman to cross the Atlantic in an airplane. Known as "Lady Lindy, First Lady of the Air," she was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, make a nonstop flight across the United States, and fly from Hawaii to the United States. She was recognized by Congress with the Distinguished Flying Cross and was one of the few women selected for the National Hall of Fame. She was lost over the Pacific during a flight in 1937. Since her disappearance, speculation has arisen about the true mission of her flight. Recent research has produced evidence that she may have been on a mission to monitor the military buildup of the Japanese in the Pacific. (13:231, 24:117)

**Blanch Stuart Scott** (1886-1970), "Tomboy of the Air," was the first woman to make a solo flight. She performed with barnstormers on the "daredevil circuit" in the hope that her stunts would encourage more opportunities for women in aeronautics. The pioneer

pilot later served as special consultant for the U. S. Air Force at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, a position she held until 1956. (23)

The World War II era had encouraged women to enter jobs traditionally held by men. As part of the war mobilization program, the federal government launched an unprecedented effort to draw women into the workforce and change public opinion of women's roles. **Rosie the Riveter**, a character in a popular song who became a popular symbol for women, and who rolled up her sleeves and went to work for the war was also portrayed on a postage stamp. The competent image that had inspired so many during the war failed to survive the war. Women were encouraged to return to their homes.

Before the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act, women could not be permanently enlisted in the military. They were assigned to special auxiliary forces which were established to meet manpower shortages. The act excluded women from combat and imposed a two- percent ceiling on women. The ceiling was lifted in 1967 to ease the shortages in Vietnam.

The change to an all-volunteer force in 1973 and changing demographics resulted in more manpower shortages and again created opportunities previously denied women. Aviation assignments were opened to women in the Navy. With the exception of the Marine Corps, other services soon followed. A 1973 Supreme Court landmark decision overturned the law that granted unequal benefits to spouses of military men and women unless the spouses of military women could prove that they were, in fact , dependent on their wives for more than 50 percent of their support. Sharon Fontiero, a U. S. Air Force lieutenant brought suit when she was denied medical benefits and a housing allowance, benefits wives received without question. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who later became the second woman to be appointed a Supreme Court Justice, argued the case. The decision, which traced the evolution of women's legal status in America, began:

"There can be no doubt that our Nation has had a long and unfortunate history of sex discrimination. Traditionally, such discrimination was rationalized by an attitude of "romantic paternalism" which, in practical effect, put women, not on a pedestal, but in a cage...our statute books gradually became laden with gross stereotyped distinctions between the sexes..." (7:74)

The post World War II military policy toward the family was maintained until 1975. The policy assumed that women's natural responsibilities as wives and mothers were incompatible with their military duties and that the former must take precedence irrespective of their professional value to the service. Pregnancy was automatic grounds for discharge. The Clinton administration's new policy on women in combat further expanded the role of women in the military. Exposure to risk alone became insufficient ground for excluding women from a particular assignment. Today, virtually all billets are open to women in the Air Force and Navy (20:160) with 70 percent and 62 percent open to women in the Army and Marine Corps, respectively. (LTC McElroy/SGM Williams, personal communications, 1 Sep 98) Women are barred from almost all assignments that involve operating offensive weapons and ground fighting. The issues of women in combat challenge the deeply held assumptions and beliefs about the nature of war, the military, men and women, and the debate continues today.

## Stamping the Way for Others: Our Civil Servants

Women civil servants were almost non-existent until the mid-1800s when women began employment as copyists. Their job was to duplicate documents by hand prior to the invention of the typewriter. Clara Barton (1821-1912) was one of the first female copyists and perhaps the first woman employee of the federal government. She had resigned the teaching job she had held for two decades in protest of sexism that promoted a male administrator. There was strong objection to providing office space for her and the other women in the Patent Office. In 1853, the Secretary of the Interior told Congress that "placing women in a government building is an obvious impropriety in mixing of the sexes within the walls of a public office." (8:12) The paychecks for married women were made out to their husbands.

A skillful organizer, Clara Barton was shocked by the Union's lack of preparation at the beginning of the Civil War. She began a drive for food and medical supplies for the troops. She was also adept at using the media and her congressional contacts to draw public attention to soldiers' needs. She left her copyist job when supplies started arriving and converted her home to a warehouse, then hired mules and wagons, organized friends, and delivered the supplies to the battleground. Before the war's end she received an official appointment as an Army nurse. Her relief efforts, unconventional bravado, and amazing endurance earned her the reputation as the most famous Civil War nurse. At the war's end she opened an agency to serve as a clearinghouse for missing soldiers and marked the graves of 13,000 Union soldiers who had died while at Andersonville, a Confederate prisoner-of-war camp. Clara Barton did not feel that her Civil War experiences were any more remarkable than the hundreds of others who shared them but were forgotten. After the war she returned to her government job and later founded the Red Cross, the accomplishment that assured her a place in every American history book. At first the American State Department refused to be involved with the Red Cross. It took almost a decade of political work before the United States ratified the Red Cross Treaty in 1882. The militarily acclaimed "angel of the battlefield" has been an inspiration to generations of women for her courage, persistence, and industry. (24:28)

As increasing numbers of women entered federal service, Congress set maximum salaries for women clerks at \$600 per year as opposed to \$1200 for men. (8:12) It was not until 1923 that the Classification Act established the concept of equal pay for equal work; however, jobs could still be typed by gender. Almost 40 years would lapse before the 1870 law that typed jobs by gender was repealed.

**Dorothea Dix** (1802-1887), was the first woman appointed to a federal administration position in this country. She held a Civil War position as Superintendent of the United States Army Nurses. Dorothea Dix was most famous for her innovative work with the mentally ill. Outraged that women with mental illness were jailed, she set about to improve their facilities and earned a reputation for being a busybody in the male political world. In defiance of conventions against women traveling alone, she traveled 30,000 miles across 15 states writing for her cause even though women speaking in public was also improper. (24:109) She successfully established 32 institutions for the insane. She never lost her drive. Dying, she was quoted as saying, "I think even lying in my bed, I can still do something." (3:113) The nation gave her a lasting monument at Arlington National Cemetery. She gave the nation the means for living better -- pensions for veterans and

financial aid for nurses.

**Mary McLeod Bethune** (1875-1955), the first free child to be born to her freed-slave parents, refused to be limited by the constraints of her environment. Her parents became sharecroppers for their former master after emancipation. She was working in the cotton fields when she received word that a benefactor had provided for her education. A young Quaker teacher wanted to donate her earnings "to give an education to a colored girl, providing you can find one you know will make good." (24:35) Mary McLeod Bethune made good. She became the founder of Bethune-Cookman College. When women gained the right to vote, she urged Black participation. She became a personal friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and an advisor to Franklin Delano Roosevelt on Black affairs. Her appointment to the Office of Minority Affairs of the National Youth Administration marked the first time a Black woman had held such a high-level government post. She served on the Advisory Committee to the Women's Army Corps since its inception and argued for integration. President Truman appointed her to the founding conference of the United Nations. She became a government emissary to Liberia. This nationally recognized leader of Black women was founding president of the National Council of Negro Women and was active in many organizations including the NAACP, National Association of Colored Women, the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, and Planned Parenthood. Wishing to inspire others she left as legacy to her people her philosophy of living and serving. In her last will and testament she says, "I leave you love.... hope.... the challenge of developing confidence in one another... a thirst for education...a respect for the uses of power...faith... racial dignity...a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow men...a responsibility to our young people." (4:140,146)

**Francis Perkins** (1880-1965), was the first female Cabinet member in our nation's history. The Secretary of Labor under President Roosevelt achieved a series of revolutionary changes that are basic to today's economy. Taking office during the Great Depression, her tasks were Herculean. With great urgency she helped draft and implement the Federal Emergency Relief Act, which gave money to the unemployed; the Civilian Conservation Corps Act, which provided jobs; the National Labor Relations Act, which prohibited employers from interfering with workers' right to organize; the Social Security Act, which created unemployment and old-age insurance; and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which set a minimum wage and a work week of forty-four hours. Her appointment had been denounced by male leaders of organized labor but she accomplished more in a few months than others had in decades. The outbreak of World War II resulted in the largest recruitment of minorities and women in our nation's history, and with this change came new challenges. Feminists criticized Perkin's moderate course on women's issues, but she felt political reality required it to keep her seat to benefit workers of both genders. A witness to a tragic fire which killed 146 factory workers, she spent her life fighting conditions which would permit such tragedy. (25:647) President Truman appointed her to the Civil Service Commission. The woman who led our Labor Department through the nation's most severe depression and a world war was once asked whether her sex had handicapped her in public life. "Yes," she replied, "in climbing trees." (25:538-539)

**Eleanor Roosevelt** (1884-1962), devoted her lifetime to seeing that women gained more representation in government and world affairs. After polio had rendered Franklin Roosevelt's legs almost useless, she became his legs and ears. (24:297) Her travels and

efforts were considered the key to the success of establishing the Democratic platform, which gave women parity with men and was crucial to her husband's election as President of the United States. Known as the mother of a generation, Eleanor became the protector of those most likely to be left out -- the poor, women, Blacks, and children. She changed the role of First Lady using press conferences, radio shows, and columns to reach out to the people and promote her causes. At her insistence, President Roosevelt appointed Francis Perkins as Secretary of Labor (the first woman to hold a cabinet post). Eleanor Roosevelt's political, economic, and professional views were radically modern and caused much controversy and hate mail. During World War II, President Roosevelt encouraged his wife to make personal reports as she traveled to all wartime fronts. White House briefings often began with "My missus says...." (24:297) Only 10 days after the First Lady's syndicated column suggested that women pilots were a weapon waiting to be used, the Secretary of War announced the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS). Eleanor Roosevelt remained an activist after her husband's death. She was appointed to the newly formed United Nations and became its only female delegate. She was the driving force behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Realizing that many nations would take "all men are created equal" literally she began drafting gender neutral language. She chaired President Kennedy's Presidential Committee on the Status of Women and in her last official duties worked on the Equal Pay Act. She continues to be recognized as one of the most influential women of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (24:294)

**Rachel Carson** (1907-1964), brought environmental awareness into the mainstream of American thought. Her work, *Silent Spring*, exposed the dangers of overuse of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers and is now viewed as the founding document of the environmental movement. She was one of the first two women hired by the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries (later the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) as a biologist. Her ability to write poetically about technical subjects was widely acclaimed and her books became best sellers. She won the National Book Award and New York Times award for the outstanding book of the year. She realized that there were no government agencies dedicated to the preservation of the environment and that a changed political philosophy was necessary. Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring* to call attention to the interconnectedness of life and the global level of destruction to the human habitat. The book prophesied a spring, which was silent without birds and small animals, unless use of toxins was curbed. Multibillion-dollar industries ridiculed and attempted to discredit her, but she had already successfully launched an era of modern environmentalism. Within a year, 40 bills concerning pesticide regulation were pending in state legislatures. Carson died before the government decision in 1969 to ban DDT. As one newspaper editor said, "A few thousand words from her, and the world took a new direction." (7:34, 6:104, 121, 24:69)

### **Putting a Stamp on the Future**

The stories of these women give reasons for hope in the future. Women have challenged the social traditions that limited their potential. They have suffered but they have endured and they have triumphed. They have assumed roles that were once the exclusive domain of men. Education, health care, family, environment-- once called "women's issues" concern everyone now. The end of the Cold War has shifted emphasis from military to domestic issues. The new era emphasizes intuition, connectedness, and interrelationships,



characteristics generally associated with femininity. Women have amassed expertise on domestic issues and are influencing business and politics with new styles of leadership. The authoritarian management approach is shifting in favor of a more feminized approach that favors supporting and empowering people. It is characterized by openness, trust, compassion, and understanding. The United States has shifted from an industrial to an information society. The global spread of democracy and the economy will create new challenges and opportunities for women. Women are becoming social activists in Third World countries to overcome the health, education, and welfare issues that threaten to disrupt the world economy. The diversity of American women has become more and more evident. There are still barriers to unity. Equality does not diminish resources, it enhances them. In this imperfect world, sexism, violence, sexual abuse, and harassment are still with us. If we are to become a truly pluralistic society, our differences must be freely expressed and celebrated. We must join in partnerships for the betterment of all humanity. Exploring the historical times and the positions of women helps us understand the human connections we share across generations and our connections with one another. The stamps celebrating women's contributions further this important process.

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